POETRY QUARTERLY

SUMMER - 1941

SELECTIONS FROM THE UNPUBLISHED NOTE-BOOKS OF RICHARD JEFFERIES
Edited by Samuel J. Looker

THE GAPING RAVEN OF MORTE
by Henry Williamson

NEW POEMS
by David Fridlander, Ian Serraillier, Roy McFadden, Nicholas Moore, Patricia Ledward, Jacquier and others

and

REVIEWS

Edited by Wrey Gardiner

GREY WALLS PRESS, BILLERICAY
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EDITORIAL

THERE is little need to apologize for the fact that our two prose contributions for this number are not directly connected with poetry, but the work of our greatest nature writers past and present. As a nation we have always turned a keener eye than others on the outward and visible world of nature. Take away hills and the sea, fields, trees, and birds, and would not the very soul of English poetry be gone? And is it not a comforting thought in these times of wholesale destruction of cities, and the irreplaceable monuments of the past that whatever mechanized brutality mankind employs he cannot banish from the earth the glory of the natural world? The celandine, campion and wild rose will appear in English fields and ditches as the seasons revolve. No hand of man can prevent the rain from making the grass green. By the product of the countryside we shall live and survive and the apple blossom is something more than a passing pleasure to the eye. It is a sign and a symbol of the eternal presence of that Mother Earth who never deserts her children when they deign to give her their love and attention.

There has been a tendency lately to consider book reviews as a superfluous part of the literary magazine. Surely it is the duty of such a periodical to be a formative influence on the opinion of the public, to endeavour to maintain some sort of critical standard among readers. It is not denied that today literary criticism has sunk to a low form of mutual back slapping and log rolling among friends, or a mere paragraph of congratulatory words or hasty dismissal after fluttering a few pages by an over-worked hack without any attempt to give a reasoned judgment. We seek in our humble way to repair this deficit. Our opinions are unbiassed by the vagaries of enmity, friendship or finance. We have but One God and that is Good Poetry.

SELECTIONS FROM THE UNPUBLISHED NOTE-BOOKS OF RICHARD JEFFERIES

edited by

SAMUEL J. LOOKER

IN the preface to *The Story of My Heart*, Mr. C. J. Longman, the publisher of that book, and one of Jefferies' few and constant friends, quotes a letter which the author wrote in June, 1883, when he was living in West Brighton, in which Jefferies says:—

> I have just finished writing a book about which I have been meditating *seventeen* years. I have called it "The Story of my Heart: an Autobiography," and it really is an autobiography, an actual record of thought. After much thinking it only makes one small volume—there are no words wasted in it. I do not know whether or no you would care to see the MS.; if so, I will forward it.

This means that Jefferies must have begun thinking about *The Story* when he was only eighteen years old.

A few days later in 1883, Jefferies writes again to Mr. Longman:—

> I have much pleasure in sending you the MS. by letter post. My book is a real record—unsparing to myself as to all things—absolutely and unflinchingly true.

In the context of the book Jefferies again refers to its genesis in words which are both eloquent and moving:—

> I have been obliged to write these things by an irresistible impulse which has worked in me since early youth. They have not been written for the sake of argument, still less for any thought of profit, rather indeed the reverse. They have been forced from me by earnestness of heart, and they express my first serious convictions. For seventeen years they have been lying in my mind, continually thought of and pondered over. I was not more than eighteen when an inner and esoteric meaning began to come to me from all the visible universe, and indefinable aspirations filled me...I was sensitive to all things. Sometimes a very ecstasy of exquisite enjoyment of the entire visible universe filled me...I began to make efforts to express these thoughts in writing but could not succeed to my own liking. Again and again I made resolutions that I would write it, in some way or another, and as often failed. I could express any other idea with ease, but not this. More time, more changes, and still the same thought running beneath everything. At last, in 1880, in the old castle of Pevensey, under happy circumstances, once more I resolved and actually did write down a few notes. Even then I could not go on, but I kept the notes (I had destroyed all former beginnings) and in the end, two years afterwards began this book.

Soon after the publication of my *Jefferies' England*, I was able to acquire, among other Jefferies manuscripts, both published and un-published, four closely written notebooks,

in Jefferies' writing, including the two which contain the thoughts written down at Pevensey, of which Jefferies speaks above.

It is of great interest to study the method of work of any great writer. Richard Jefferies kept a series of note-books over a period of years. In his long tramps over the downs, in the fields and woods, and by the sea, Jefferies always carried a note-book, into which, immediately after his many moments of meditation and introspection, so characteristic of the temper of his mind, he would jot down on the spot the fruits of his thought. Thus not only the germ of *Tne Story of My Heart*, and many of the chief thoughts expressed in it, may be found recorded in his note-books, but also the plot and much of the dialogue of *The Dewy Morn*, a great Nature novel, and lastly, numerous miscellaneous nature notes, descriptions of the weather from day to day, of the observed habits of birds and animals, and wild life generally, recorded by that far-seeing and clear eye; and notes of flowers growing in field and hedge, and by the wayside, these latter often illustrated by curious little pencil drawings. In addition, here and there, in the course of the note-books, will be found personal details, such as the jottings of the titles of suggested essays he intends to write, and the names of the magazines to whom he means to offer them, or records of his expenditure and earnings, with various addresses, usually of publishers or editors, and many curious, entertaining, or even pathetic entries of one sort or another. In one note-book for example, Jefferies' small son Harold, has written his name and address across two pages in sprawling, childish capitals, once straightforwardly and once backwards with one letter missing.

Any consideration of Jefferies' methods of writing and composition would have to rely to a great extent upon an analysis of the contents of these note-books.

The present whereabouts of many Jefferies manuscripts are unknown, and several, including the complete draft of *The Story of My Heart*, are in America. Altogether, according to Sir Walter Besant, there were twelve note-books. Eight have disappeared since, but the present writer owns four, two of which, as mentioned above, contain the notes for *The Story of My Heart*. Here, in these hurriedly written pencil notes, yet in a charming script, we can trace, step by step, day by day, the working of Jefferies' mind. In the two note-books dealing with *The Story of My Heart*, each separate note, and there are often three or four on the one page, is headed *S.L.* I conclude that these letters

stand for *Soul Life*. It was thus, in the process of composition, that Jefferies thought of his book. No doubt, later on, when the manuscript was finished, and ready for a publisher, he realised that such a title would put off, or even mislead, the general, or as old-fashioned authors might say, the gentle reader. It is quite clear however, that the dominant note in *The Story of My Heart* is Jefferies' cry for a more intense *Soul Life*.

I hope at some future time to transcribe the note-books in their entirety. For the moment I am only able to give the contents of a few specimen pages.

From the Note-Book marked on flyleaf VI. July 31st. 1879.

31st. July. Some rain early morning. Not fine evening. Sedge in pond.

1st. August. Rain in night: some early morning; fine not day. Burdock in flower (thistle like) Thistles in flower in barley so thick as to give it a purple tint over two or three acres.

2nd. August. Fine morning. Afternoon cloudy N.E. wind strong and cool. Yellowhammer, greenfinch too. Night at eleven.—Lightning is very fierce.—See roses in the garden in the flashes—thunder louder after storm passed as if blown back by N.E. wind. Lightning long flashes quivering several seconds.

3rd. August. Morning dull, hot. Thrushes and blackbirds do not sing: but did up to within day or two. Willow wren singing zitzit—yellow-hammer very much—greenfinch too.

4th. August Rain early morning: hot: fine day.

5th. August Cloudy: evening heavy rain. A little while since plantain flowered in wet ditch.

6th. August. Fine morning; Showers later. Lightning, heavy thunder. At 4 exceedingly heavy rain. Fog came on early afternoon—rooks stopped in copse instead of going home to wood—not done it for fifty years—could not find way.

7th. August. Cloudy morning: afternoon light showers. Bunch of sod apple in bloom...Rooks fond of maize. Rooks nest in tall Scotch firs: also spruce very high. Bramble still in flower very much: plane tree leaves already brown, leathery in spots—wood pigeons calling? Spring and autumn not summer: sparrows in oats, scores, on stalk below grain still green, out for grain.

8th. August. Small rain morning: afterwards dry. Barley—thistles rise from roots, not seed: a spindle root. Yesterday saw a small dragonfly: either first or else rare. Swifts still here and screaming.

11th. August. Cloudy misty morning: Farmer market morning waiting at stile until another came along with trap, for ride. A large green dragon-fly: it is their season then. Last full moon was very high in the sky: near zenith.

15th. August. Hot cloudy morning—fine despite clouds. Drovers come in, ask for hard biscuits, and toast at the fire: then take tallow candle from table and drop grease from it on biscuit till it would not suck up any more, and eat it as very good: as special relish after 2 days drinking.

From the two note-books which contain Jefferies' notes for *The Story of My Heart*, written in the shadow of the old castle of Pevensey in 1880:—

S.L. Define the Deity—the definition of an atom.

S.L. In leaving the platform of the earth and entering space—considering the immense—I am checked, confused and bewildered, which I have absorbed by the ideas of time, distance, design, space, motion—these have to be overcome, removed from the mind—obliterated, before I can begin to understand. None of these outside this little earth...existence too, ideas of God, soul immortality—none of which are large enough to fit the starry space.

It requires a starry algebra—conic sections of the mind—to estimate, to measure the indefinite.

S.L. Since the telescope, not a single idea — not even a geometrical one—not known to the ancients.

S.L. I felt like Herodotus among the superstitious and cheating Egyptians—searching through the experience of the ages.

After modern voluminous intricacy delightful to return to the clearheadedness of the Greek and Roman classics, to Socrates's mode of arranging ideas. All who wish to approach natural knowledge should read these: to train the mind.

S.L. The ring, like struck metal, of the sea in the still night.

After all speculations—comes the thought of those that are dead, and to us there is no consolation.

S.L. While half the world lies buried in the night, shadow covered.

S.L. So pitiful that human heroism leaves nothing behind. And still the human hogs are most plentiful and are the rulers.

S.L. If I feel well—if fortunate, I am to feel grateful not to any God—but because gratitude is good feeling.

S.L. In my illness and misfortune I have not supposed them inflicted by any God. That is extreme impiety.

S.L. If you must pray or think of prayer, pray for knowledge—for the mind to be opened—that we may get outside our circle of ideas.

S.L. The soul. A generated idea. Generated ideas may be true, as that of the cycloid.

S.L. Mind, Heart and Soul demand something. As these are non-existent—the existence of the demand (word illegible) prove them: if it proves at all it proves the Beyond.

S.L. This Beyond does not exist for me alone. Even if I had no hope in it or from it, still it would be there existing.

Here must end these quotations from three of the four note-books in my possession. A selection from some six hundred pages in all of closely written notes. I hope that other readers will at least be interested in these intimate revealings of the inner mind of England's greatest nature writer.

I Saw a Broken Town

I saw a broken town beside the grey March sea,
Spray flung in the air and no larks singing,
And houses lurching, twisted, where the chestnut trees
Stood ripped and stark; the fierce wind bringing
The choking dust in clouds along deserted streets,
Shaking the gaping rooms, the jagged, raw-white stone.
Seeking for what in this quiet, stricken town? It beats
About each fallen wall, each beam, leaving no livid,
aching place alone.

MABEL E. ALLEN.

When the water was as marble

Evening on the bridge. Listless the air
and the bat's flight ridiculous. A sky
of islands, mirrored in the marble water's
polished danger. These elms—planted
by your fear—in tense enchantment held,
like weed in an ocean pool moon-charmed.

No music. Only the moorhen's quarrel and
from the dead willow the owl's hiss.
No swan to smooth the dark crisis of the stream.
Doom for the world, you said? and when
it falls?

The tiny corner of light.
Your groping fingers find answer
in a touch: 'Plotting the vital centre changeless,
carve in this marble your own universe,
before the gun, trained as sculptor's drill to splinter,
carves Chaos there. Remembering, if Chaos comes
there'll be no Saturn.'

IAN L. SERRAILLIER.

Moonlight

Frail the pale pools of silver
and the low green lights of June,
they fold their long lean shadows
over the moonlit room.

Quietly the dark yews whisper,
on the green sheen windows walk;
they seal the moist blue flowers
with old long fading talk.

Slender and lean the goldfish
asleep in their green glass homes
dreaming their dreams of moon streams
with gentle wind-washed stones.

ERIC NIXON.

To-morrow

There's something in to-day
That holds to-morrow
A captive in
The swaddling-bands of sorrow,
That the old hands
Of traffic, and abuse,
Clinch with the tight-drawn
Cunning of a noose;
So that his height
Beneath his promise lags,
His robe of angels
Sold for motley rags.

DAVID FRIDLANDER.

Here in this Garden

Here in this garden,
Because some men are knaves and some are fools
The tulip will not bloom, and all the daffodils
Must harden
Into golden spears of retribution.

Earth grow cold,
Push icy fingers into the fevered wound,
Disgorge all last year's corpses from the sickening
ground,
We sold
The tenuous day dream for the statesmen's gold.

Sighing turn
Not the head, but merge the hot soul in earth,
The dark womb where the embryo had troubled birth.
And burn
Burn with the roses in this silent garden.

ROY McFADDEN.

Archipelagos

(For Priscilla)

Bright dreams, bright loveliness, bright architecture—
Around the one word "bright" a thousand words,
Words to sing praise with, praise the brightest nature
That I have known in misery of worlds.

And this bright one, this darling, who is she
Who might destroy a thousand men by love,
Driving them with a word from their country
To conquer archipelagos and move

Mountains, if they could only win her smile.
She is the mystery, the monster of the isle,
And you, my darling, are this "bright" to me,
The historic lady bound by history's sea.

NICHOLAS MOORE.

Song

Now let us close our eyes and dream of spring,
And the outpouring of the sun on the bleeding earth:
They have hung us upside down, like dirty washing,
To drip away the dross of dialectic birth.
And we can hear the distant sound of time
Reverberating like a rapid gun,
Under the solemn arching of the hours
That run revolving round a static sun.

. . . . and let us be
A polished pool of quietness;
And let us know that we are just
A fragmentary episode
On some old tapestry:
And let us cast aside at last
Our servile consciousness,
Our centrifugal mode
Of dead nonentity,
Cast everything away, back to the earth that bleeds,
Like the tender summer grasses cast their seeds . . . .
And rest . . . .
Until our wavering circle flounders in the tideless sea.

For soon the coltsfoot will come seeping
Beneath the rubbish on the ruined plots,
Inverted sunshine creeping
On the frozen clods:
And there will be a sharp-tipped thrust
Of tiny points through the snow's pale crust.
Already in the trees there's been an hour
Of movement, and a bushy smudge of colour,
A muted plucking of green strings,
A tremulous uplifting of green wings,
. . . . And a sudden startled singing of wild things.

PATRICIA LEDWARD.

Dreaming Boats

No moon.

The still, unrippled sea lies stained with light
Shone coldly from a dying western sky,
An ebbing sunset in its drowsy veins
In delicate surrender to the night.

No sign.

No sensibility of tide or time
Save that betrayed by two small solemn boats
As now they glide in sleep, with sails forlorn,
To seek in dreams the distant harbour left.

No motion.

No watch, no light, no voice, no sound:
Displayed inanimate in vitrine air,
Two pieces set in elegance upon
The soft metallic lustre of the sea.

No stir.

Pillowed serene in faintly billowed mist
And wrapped in shades narcotic spun from dusk,
Lulled by motioned beat of slow-winged birds,
Trailing dipped nets like midnight drapery.

Drifting.
Dreaming.

REGINALD AKHURST.
Cpl. R.A.F.

Out of the Night

Far from the day,
In the cling, damp weight of the dark,
I have smelt the breath of decay.
I have trodden the path in the darkness.
Silence torn.
I have found the shadows of fear
On the echoing walls of night,
And in twilight
I wait for the dawn.

JOHN EDWARD.

I admired him digging

I admired him digging
They were making an air-raid shelter
and a young workman was digging
the sullen, yellow clay.
With a curved rhythm that did not falter
came the thrust of the spade, the tugging,
the lift and the cast away.

In admiration
I saw his strength with the earth.
In his task was a close relation
(he sang as he worked away)
with our newly invented death,
but he was entirely immortal—
Man and the wrestling clay.

With sinews hardened,
his frame's rude grace appearing,
he worked as Adam gardened;
his strong hands caked with grime
in the dirty slacks he was wearing,
(flax hair was curved at his brow)
he was beautiful, carved in time.

SARA BRYAN.

Youth's Prayer

Let me not live till I am old,
When the fire is dead, the story told,
And all that's left an empty shell
Which only stirs for the dinner-bell.
Let me remember youth's wild ways,
And never whine for the good old days.
Let me not lose the use of limb,
Nor rheumily peer through eyes grown dim.
Let me not cringe at death's approach,
And summon surgeons aid to poach
A few more days of fret and pain
From out eternity's still domain.

M. McKENZIE.

The Humble Rhymster

No humble wand'rer on the slope,
Unheard, unknown, could ever hope
To scratch his name on Darien!
For me the lowly valleys wind
Where sheep bells tinkle, and more kind
The breeze than on Parnassus;
Yet hope there were, perchance, that sheep
And shepherds simple tryst might keep
With one whose song, unsoaring, sings
Of Life's simplicities!

CONSTANCE ROBINSON.

Cheyne Walk

Pagodas cunningly carved in jade the planetrees lean along the walk
And shrill red jasper in the gardens breaks upon the dahlia's stalk.
Statelily the white swans sail and scarcely they a ripple make,
With heads well poised upon a neck that arches like an angry snake.
Above them burns a turquoise sky; a golden glimmer is the air;
And boys are rods of ivory that cleave the crystal waters there.

SYDNEY THOMAS ANSELL.

Almost Spring
(*For L.O.B.*)

Tangible clouds sprawl
with gaunt, reclining faces in the ink-blue waste,
their bases parallel with earth.
But more important:—
the laced branches of the beech
hanging on the cream-white gable,
each with the sharp, clean message,
and the glory
of almost spring,
and more than shadows.

ROBERT GREACEN.

Sounds of Summer

Let winter cease its harsh and sombre sounds,
The winds of March their long and sad complaint,
Come now the Summer sounds delectable
A chorus, eager, full, without restraint.
Innumerable birds with willing song,
Contribute greatest with unstinted praise
From lark untiring in the unplumbed space
To others near at hand, their music raise.
The ring of harrow chains across the croft
The guttural voice of drover to the steer,
A trimmer's snip as hedgerow twigs are cut,
Metallic sounds, but pleasing to the ear.
Now urge the milkbound cattle their demand,
Soon maids with clanking cans haste to respond
And clatter o'er the farmyard cobble stones
Whilst rattling ploughshare moves to leas beyond.
Slowly we pass through meadows to the stream
Where willows wave with purring swish o'erhead,
And hear the plop of water rat below
Released by day from hidden muddy bed.
We draw the boat from underneath the bank
And rowlocks rattle as the oars are set,
Languid we glide toward the marshy mere,
Where humming insects form a lacy net.
At evening when we pass the village street
Machine with whirr mows long neglected lawn,
Where o'er the net soon ball and racquet meet,
And dewy diamonds glitter in the dawn.
For Summer sport has opened carnival,
Behind the village church the bowling green,
The crack of wooden bowls will soon be heard
As 'gainst the elms the village critics lean.

HOWELL DAVIES.

The Siren

How often have I turned from you
To probe the wise or seek the true;
But let your lips touch mine again,
Gone is truth, and wisdom vain.

SAMUEL J. LOOKER.

The Cloud

The North-east wind with wintry hand
Fashioned me, hammered me, wrought and planned.
No wanton breath nor careless touch
From magical vapour could conjure such.
Each curve and gleam, each silver fold
Did the North wind shape in destined mould.

A connoisseur of cloud and sky
Might capture me with his candid eye;
But the North-east wind for his own delight,
Sculptured my marble of perfect white;
And with one blow of mighty fist
Banished my vapour in pearly mist.

ELIZABETH TEMPLE WELLS.

So Much Beauty

There's so much beauty in a summer night——
And music, if ears are tuned to symphony
Of growing things. The pale moonlight
Sweeps away the veil of dusk,
Each tree a painted silhouette.
The yellow jasmine heavy as musk
Weighs on the air. The pale green mignonette,
So sweet by day, is ghostly fragrance now.
Soft winds ripple waters of the lake
And shatter stars mirrored there.
Snowy petals of the pear
Loosen and drift downward, flake by flake,
To meet the stars.
There's so much beauty in a summer night.

LILY LAWRENCE BOW.
Kansas, U.S.A.

Lyric of Lost Labours

How many stairs have blind men climbed,
Searching for gold they cannot see,
Undreamed, the hopeless wheel, untimed,
Uncharted as all reality

Of dusty corners, spiral stairs
Of lives that break upon the bars
Of daily bread and age-old cares
They cannot leave beneath the stars.

WREY GARDINER.

Impatience

I feel the shortness of time;
The mood will never come again;
The hour is striking, now and here,
And once it strikes
There'll be an end—
An end of this strange interlude,
An end of this strange inter-space.
I feel the irksomeness of people—
So much to say, so much to tell—
The hour will strike
And time go on
The hour will never come again.
I feel the waste and the frustration
Of much gentle conversation
One might have had
And comfort even
One might have given
And have taken.

JACQUIER.

For a Young Irish Poet

(*Michael Walsh who died in the flowering of his genius. Author of* BROWN EARTH AND GREEN, THE HEART REMEMBERS, MORNING, *etc.*)

When beauty was a rose for Cathleen's breast—
Alive and lustrous with the ancient fires—
We walked, and talked, in ways of pleasantness
With homage in our hearts for her desires.

And saw upon those hilltops clear and still
The bannered beauty of our dreams go by
'Mid chanting of the waves on little strands,
And by Killiney where the seagulls cry.

Such songs you sang, and magic music made
In quiet verse that breathed upon the air
The breath and burning of that Gaelic past
Which shaped the dawning world for us so fair.

A flower you seemed upon the jewelled cloak
We wove for Cathleen when our days were young
And woke and thrilled to high, heroic deeds:
But now we hear that all your songs are sung.

Ah, no,—this cannot be—whom we remember
As when we saw you gay among the throng:
You leave behind you music on the winds,
And loveliness long lingering in your song.

With all the music-makers of the Gael
In some far Gaelic island of our dreams
You lift your voice in loved and lovely lines,
And in them mingle sounds of Irish streams.

Remembered sunrisings resplendent come again
To hearts remembering at this sunset hour,
And we behold you now as once we saw
A jewelled cloak, and on that breast a flow'r.

PADRAIG O'HORAN.

Understanding

Last night I read until I grasped no more
And then turned out the light and stirred the fire:
I watched the shadows crouching on the floor,
Whilst on the walls, to mock my own desire,

Leaped yellow light. About the silent room
Where gleams on glass and curves of polished wood
Along their shelves my books lay ranked in gloom,
Now mute, that had been eloquent and good.

And then you came—I know you came, my dear:
You smiled at me then took the other chair
I could not move, although you were so near
I might have touched your hand or smoothed your hair.

The old provoking secret look that you
Had always worn, was gone. Oh, you were secret yet,
But tender; though you did not speak I knew
What words you brought: Remember—and forget.

Quite soon you'd gone, and made no sound or stir
Nor any mark upon your cushioned place;
And I was left to hold in empty air
The sweetness of the firelight on your face.

And so I must forget, rejecting all
The pain, the folly, and the old distress,
But saving what you'd wish me to recall—
Your gay glad moments, and your loveliness.

RAYMOND HODGE.

David Watson . May 13th, 1940

He sped into the morning, strained awake,
Steel and machine were organs of his being.
He fell, a twisting and tormented thing,
He crashed, unseeing.

Roll out the drums for youth gone out to die,
Blare the shrill trumpet, muffle the men's tread,
Give him a solemn sable funeral
Who is most great, being dead.

MARGARET HOWORTH.

THE GAPING RAVEN OF MORTE

by

HENRY WILLIAMSON

NOT far from the Morte there are broken cliffs and awful precipices, and as you creep on hands and knees to the edge (while in fear your spaniel whines and crouches ten yards away) the roar of the sea increases, and you are looking down—two, three, four hundred feet to the pools and rocks below.

Jackdaws slip from their nests in the holes of the ledges, among the white sea-campion and the sturdier pink thrift, and cry *ker-jack, ker-jack, ker-jank, jank!* But long before they give the alarm the Gaping Raven has called softly and in a deep voice like a strong, sober man swearing when he breaks a bootlace, *krok-krok, krok.* Three throaty croaks, and his mate flaps from her nest of sticks and branches of furze, when you are two hundred yards away.

The Gaping Raven is old. He has nested in that dangerous place for scores of years. Probably he believes himself to be immortal. The upper and lower mandibles of his beak are always open, like a washerwoman's clothes peg. During the months of nesting he perches—when not seeking his food of beetles, daws' eggs, young rabbits, and carrion—on the top of the precipice among the stunted bluebells and the sparse bracken, preening and meditating, watching.

He sits on a little knoll which gives a field of view upon all approaches, and scratches with the claws of his knobbed feet. His head is nearly bald and his skin is black and wrinkled like pitch in the sun. He scratches scores of times in an hour and shakes his plumage, which looks like a fly-blown black boa thrown away on Hampstead Heath on Bank Holiday night. I shouldn't be surprised if I were told that he hadn't been inside an egg for a century.

And always that malevolent gape. Yesterday I climbed to a ledge whence a view of the nest could be seen, and the old bird and his mate flew near me, their feathers glinting shiny-purple in the sun. They dived at the jackdaws, and when a kestrel-hawk—dainty, slender windhover with large brown eye, red-brown back, and grey poll—came to its eyrie near, they bullied it away, screaming in rage and fear.

On the ledge I found one of the Gaping Raven's pinion feathers, and it smelt rank and musty. I found also the furry skeletons of many rabbits, all the bones picked by the powerful beaks. There were rat skulls as well, and the headless remains of sea-birds—they had picked those up on the tide line, birds whose heads had been knocked off by the stoop of peregrine falcons.

The fledglings in the nest croaked to their parents for food, heedless of the warning to crouch low and keep silent. Not liking the ledge at all, since it was one hundred and fifty feet to the rocks below, and most of the hand-clutches and footholds were loosely embedded flakes and therefore treacherous, I climbed up again and made my kettle-fire in a cove about three hundred yards up the coast. While I sat there afterwards, smoking, my companion yelled to me in his boyish excitement to observe something in the sky.

I looked up and saw the Gaping Raven with some immense thing in its beak. High above him a peregrine falcon was anchored in the wind, and even as I watched it dropped like a black anchor-head of iron, making its point at the raven. The plunder was immediately dropped and, uttering an oath of rage or boredom, the raven prepared to arrest the plunge with the twin spears of his beak.

As usual the fight ended in a draw; but what I am so eager to impart to you is this: the plunder fell with a clash and a clang on the rocks, and scrambling to it, we picked up a young rabbit in a gin, or steel trap, with chain attached, the load weighing about three pounds.

My Chaffinch *

by Richard Jefferies

His hours he spends upon a fragrant fir;
His merry "chink," his happy "Kiss me, dear,"
Each moment sounded, keeps the copse astir.
Loudly he challenges his rivals near,
Anon aslant down to the ground he springs,
Like to a sunbeam made of coloured wings.

The firm and solid azure of the ceil
That struck by hand would give a hollow sound,
A dome turned perfect by the sun's great wheel,
Whose edges rest upon the hills around,
Rings many a mile with blue enamelled wall;
His fir-tree is the centre of it all.

*This is the only existent poem by the great naturalist. It was printed by his widow at the end of the volume of collected essays *Field and Hedgerow*, published two years after Jefferies' death in 1889, and is very little known.

It has not been printed elsewhere. In natural charm and vision it compares with the delightful verse of the Northamptonshire peasant poet John Clare.

A lichened cup he sets against the side
    High up this mast, earth-stepped, that
        could not fail,
But swung a little as a ship might ride,
    Keeping an easy balance in the gale;
Slow heaving like a gladiator's breast,
Whose strength in combat feels an idle rest.

Whether the cuckoo or the chaffinch most
    Do triumph in the issuing of their song?
I say not this, but many a swelling boast
    They throw each at the other all day long.
Soon as the nest had cradled eggs a-twin
The jolly squirrel climbed to look therein.

Adown the lane athwart this pleasant wood
    The broad-winged butterflies their
        solace sought;
A green-necked pheasant in the sunlight stood,
    Nor could the rushes hide him as he thought.
A bumble-bee through fern and thistle made
A search for lowly flowers in the shade.

A thing of many wanderings, and loss,
    Like to Ulysses on his poplar raft,
His treasure hid beneath the tunnelled moss
    Lest that a thief his labour steal with craft,
Up the round hill, sheep-dotted, was his way,
Zigzagging where some new adventure lay.

"My life and soul," as if he were a Greek,
    His heart was Grecian in his greenwood fane;
"My life and soul," through all the sunny week
    The chaffinch sang with beating heart amain.
"The bumble-bee the wide wood-world may roam;
One feather's breadth I shall not stir from home."

No note he took of what the swallows said
    About the firing of some evil gun,
Nor if the butterflies were blue or red,
For all his feelings were intent in one.
The loving soul, a-thrill in all his nerves,
A life immortal as a man deserves.

REVIEWS

I have brushed away the insects of literature, whether fluttering or creeping;
I have shaken the little stems of many a plant, and the flowerets have fallen.

The Pursuits of Literature, 1798

BAR GOLD AND PAPER MONEY

WILLIAM Blake wrote "Everything that lives is holy," and Yeats, who deeply admired Blake and thought him "the champion of the humanly embodied soul, against mere abstract reason," might have taken these words as his own.

Yeats was influenced by J. N. Synge and it was Synge who said "What is highest in poetry is always reached where the dreamer is leaning out to reality. The great poets are supremely engrossed with life, and yet with the wildness of their fancy they are always passing out of what is simple and plain." Finally, Yeats himself in one of his essays tells us that Art bids us touch and taste and hear and see the world.

The poetry of Yeats* is memorable, whether written in his early or later manner, and this is exactly what the work of most modern poets is not. His early poems move to measures of sweet sound, but he did not fall, like other poets of the school, into insipidity and ineptitude. Mr. MacNeice points out that while much of his later poetry, and some of his finest at that, was oblique, complicated, even obscure, yet it showed increase in strength and concentration. The poet who began by writing as if he had a sword upstairs, ended by thinking there was more credit in walking naked. Among the poets of his time, Yeats was a giant among pigmies:

> Through Jonathan Swift's dark grove he passed, and there
> Plucked bitter wisdom that enriched his blood.

There are signs in the writings of his middle period that he had begun to take to heart the advice of the friend who believed that "before verse can be human again, it must learn to be brutal."

When we think of Yeats' intellectual background we soon realise how rich and varied it was. John O'Leary, the old lion who thought that while no gentleman can be a socialist, he might be an anarchist, was one of his associates. Other close friends were A. E., Lady Gregory,

**The Poetry of W. B. Yeats, by Louis MacNeice. Oxford University Press (Humphrey Milford) 8s. 6d. net.*

Maud Gonne, and Synge, also George Moore was of his circle at one time, but the two men disliked each other.

The great poet's beauty is power. Power over words, power over thought. Plato declared that "Fixity can never be the quality of Eternal Life." Great poets, like Shelley and Yeats, both of whom were Plato's disciples, are not afraid to change or experiment. They are always alive to new ideas, new currents of thought and feeling. They are creative and vital and because of this, often quarrel with others, the little men, and with themselves. Yeats himself, in *Per Amica Silentia Lunae* summed up the matter in a sentence:—"We make out of the quarrel with others, rhetoric, but out of the quarrel with ourselves, poetry." Yeats in short, felt continually the "fascination of what's difficult." He strove after, not only an unattainable perfection of language, but also an unattainable perfection of living. He knew that the poet must wrestle with his soul in solitude and must learn to be and live, alone. Then, if he be true to his vision in suffering, he will end with the exalted cry of Van Gogh "How rich Art is!" How far, in *The Tower* and *The Winding Stair*, Yeats had travelled from his early belief to "nowise worship dusty deeds," and that "words alone are certain good," may be seen when we contrast a poem such as *The Song of the Happy Shepherd* in *Crossways* (1889) with *Death*, a short memorable poem written in 1933.

The poetry of Yeats, like that of the much under-rated George Meredith, has wing, is intellectual in the best sense, and is concerned with permanent values. Both men were robust spirits who were occupied with a world very different from that created for the "merchant and the clerk," who:—

> But fumble in a greasy till
> And add the halfpence to the pence
> And prayer to shivering prayer until
> You have dried the marrow from the bone;
> For men were born to pray and save;

Louis MacNeice in his penetrating study, compares Yeats with A. E. Housman, and he adds some interesting paragraphs on T. S. Eliot, Wilfrid Owen and D. H. Lawrence, saying that all these poets had escaped from the Nineties and approached their world from a different angle from Yeats, but it was still in many respects the same world.

This study of a great poet, written by one who is himself a significant writer of verse, must be praised for its qualities of insight, true critical appraisement and scholarship, combined with the modern spirit.

For my part, I declare that to read the poetry of Yeats is a high adventure, an exciting and vivid experience. I place him with Shakespeare, Milton and Shelley, those giants among men.

It is a sad and bitter change to turn from the high courage and profoundly creative genius of Yeats to the "mannered pastoralism, laboured simplicities and artificiality" of Edmund Blunden.* This is to go indeed from a rich interesting chamber to an empty room. Yeats at least would never have apologised, as Blunden does in his preface, for "the appearance of a poetry-book under the present calamitous cloud of war." To many of us, with all its pain and terror, "this calamitous cloud" is a noble battle for all that poets care for in the world. Made more difficult, it is true, by the folly of those who, before the war, pandered to German propaganda. Now, more than ever, is the need for poetry, brave and unashamed, to play its part, not to apologize for its very existence. I find Blunden an extremely irritating writer and very flat in tone. Now and then he is simply infuriating, as in the silly poem called *Exorcized,* written after the return from Munich, with its absurd conclusion:—

> The meeting of four men as friends unhorses all the ancient fiends ;
> Believing still the best will ever yield the best, as now it ends
> One swollen and final fear.

Mr. Blunden who reprints this nonsense, is evidently not ashamed of it. Most of the work in this volume strikes me as little more than laboured occasional verse. The poems on natural objects lack the charm and spontaneity of such a writer as John Clare, for whom Mr. Blunden has done such good editorial service. Here and there, for the worse, his poetry has been influenced by Thomas Hardy, that much overrated tiresome poet, whose measures were so lumbering and unmusical. Altogether, I have been deeply disappointed by this book, which in my judgement, will add but little to its author's reputation as a nature poet. These are not the days for the quiet thoughts of college dons, remote from the real world, expressed through the medium of manufactured verse, however soothing and innocuous.

**Poems* 1930-1940, *by Edmund Blunden,*
(*Macmillan* 10*s.* 6*d. net.*)

The *Colonies of Heaven** is a remarkable contrast to the dreary accounts of uninteresting and jejune incident which so often masquerade as autobiography. Here is the mind of a sensitive poet looking back into the past and bringing to the aid of his narrative all the power of an unusually rich and imaginative prose style. The story is skilfully unfolded from the description of the country house of his boyhood in England, before the last war, through the moving episode of his early and tragic love, down to the later descriptions of his life in France in the thirties, all follow quietly and surely and the reader is always conscious of the deep significance of every little touch of memory as seen reflected in the mind of a creative yet critical imagination. Scene, scent and colour, and the pathos of beauty, "whose action is no stronger than a flower"—the inescapable fragility of experience with the brittle quality of our deepest desires, all these things felt through the prose of a poet, make an unforgettable appeal to the thoughtful mind. The cherry tree in the garden all too soon sheds its lovely petals which flutter down in the cold winds of the spring. So the leaves of memory are wistfully conscious of change, while the poet remembers that he is growing old. Such moods all imaginative men experience, but they do not all possess the evocative skill of which Mr. Gardiner is a master. A very clear and outstanding example of this quality is to be found in the pages where he describes the atmosphere of the old house as seen through the eyes of a thoughtful boy. I put *The Colonies of Heaven* down with the thought that it possesses the greatest of all literary qualities, a true and constructive vision.

SAMUEL J. LOOKER.

ENCHANTED DIFFICULTY

Of those poets whose "emergence" in the thirties was proclaimed by such off-stage accompaniments of drum and trumpet, Mr. MacNiece is probably the most interesting. The rather tiresome title *Plant and Phantom*† is a quotation from Nietzsche. He has done well to date each poem. Those written before September 1939 already have an air of period, of belonging to a cloud-capped distant country of the mind. The boomerang of so-called realism in content strikes home, the poems seem like a faded garment that was fashionable years ago. Those written since the be-

**The Colonies of Heaven, by Wrey Gardiner,*
(Grey Walls Press, Billericay, 6s. net.)
†*Plant and Phantom by Louis MacNeice,*
(Faber and Faber, 6s.)

ginning of war—as the title poem was—have an increased clarity and seriousness, a greater emotional force which lifts them above the mere badinage and bawdiness for the sake of being clever and amusing at all costs which was the bane of these poets of the thirties. But it is a sadly confused, irritatingly muddled world he writes of, and perhaps no bad thing that it has foundered in

A mad weir of tigerish waters,

with

Nelson on his pillar
Watching the world collapse.

Cushendun Again is a lyric whose restraint and tone of finality make the following poem seem full of the straggling rhetoric that so often weakens the poetry of this school. There is always, in fact, the unfortunate impression that in the long intervals between the writing of such lyrics they just sit down after a busy day and scribble quickly whatever comes into their slick amusing minds. Needless to say it is never poetry. Had they confined themselves to singing of eternal things like love and death, or the simple joys and sorrows of humanity that no war or mere temporary disturbance of high explosive can ever change these "modern" poets would not seem to belong to a dimmed and already fading past.

Mr. Madge* inducts his reader into a very different world. He uses a language full of the strange lights of poetry, and if his meaning is not always clear, there is a residue of pleasure which is nearly always lacking in the verse being written today.

Enchanted difficulty is what we want.

he writes in *To A Mermaid* The glass entanglement of flowery hair is certainly sometimes deceiving and difficult. But the enchantment is there. Nor does Mr. Madge use those conversational rhythms now the fashion in poetry which makes one wonder if their authors' conversation can really be as arid and nauseating as one is lead to suppose from their work. Madge's forms are conventional and rhyming adds to their force. It is the matter only which is contemporary and original. In the last—and much longer poems—he attempts to scintillate with an intellectual humour perhaps too trying and unnecessary to the pedestrian intelligence. But obscure humour is the besetting vice of the modern poetry of today—or is it yesterday?—and he would do well to avoid the lure of the specious attraction of writing long poems about margarine. Amusing as this

**The Father Found* by Charles Madge,
(*Faber and Faber*, 6*s*.)

may be, one feels that he is wasting his time and his genius, which is not a small one. In fact poems like *Love in the Desert*, *Ode*, *Times*, *Loss*, and *First and Last Loves* are examples which make one wonder if there is not here a poet head and shoulders above the miserable drivellers in their cliques and coteries who have been making poetry for too long a thing of boredom and unreadability.

"And the land stank—so numerous was the fry," as Cowper said of another fraternity. *The Father Found* is only Mr. Madge's second book. I shall watch this poet's progress with interest and pleasure in the thought that in this dry and dangerous season such good work can be achieved. If a book like this could be discovered every quarter I should have no fear about the state of English poetry.

WREY GARDINER.

Between Two Worlds by E. Curt Peters.
(Grey Walls Press, 3/6.)

An onlooker watching the present gigantic upheaval could not but hold his breath, so tremendously portentous are the events taking place, not only all over the geographical world, but in men's hearts, minds and souls. Most of us can do little more than "carry on" in the midst of this vast changing of the scene, trying sometimes perhaps to glean in each sphere which is the right prophet to follow, but the poet, truest historian of all, can catch for all time the feeling, the colour and the theme of the day.

In the collection "Between Two Worlds" just published, Mr. Curt Peters has succeeded in portraying eloquently something of the vast assortment of flotsam and jetsam which goes to make up Life to-day. These poems, and some are piercing in their lovely clarity of expression, do more than record the anguish, the hope, the busyness of this age; many wander happily over the eternity of nature's gifts, so that here between two covers we have an optical aid to our own bewildered views and, I dare to say it, a miniature of the times fit for posterity's gaze. The translations from Herman Hesse are no less happy than the orginal verses.

This little book, the very touch of whose covers and sight of whose pages would soothe a sore soul, is a welcome oasis in the cacophonous jangle of our time.

NORAH DE C. BEATTY.

BOOKS RECEIVED too late to review in this issue

I, Gerontius, Paul Scott, Resurgam No. 5. Favil Press 1/-.
Confessions of Peter Pan, John Waller, 175, *Banbury Road, Oxford,* 1/-.
A Wish in Season, Nicholas Moore, Fortune Press, 4/6*d.*